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Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion

Why did people choose the Reformation? What was it in the evangelical teaching that excited, moved or persuaded them? Andrew Pettegree here tackles these questions directly by re-examining the reasons that moved millions to make this decisive and traumatic break with a shared Christian past. He charts the separation from family, friends and workmates that adherence to the new faith often entailed, and the new solidarities that emerged in their place. He explores the different media of conversion through which the Reformation message was communicated and imbibed – the role of drama, sermons, song and the book – and argues that the potency of print can only be understood as working in harmony with more traditional modes of communication. His findings offer a persuasive new answer to the critical question of how the Reformation could succeed as a mass movement in an age before mass literacy.

ANDREW PETTEGREE is Professor of Modern History and founding Director of the Reformation Studies Institute at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of a number of studies of the European Reformation, sixteenth-century Europe and the history of the printed book.

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For Bruce, Rona and Charlotte

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Preface

This book was conceived in 1991, when I made my first visit to Lutherstadt-Wittenberg, as it was then called. Standing in front of one of the display cases in the Lutherhalle Museum, I came face to face with a cascade of *Flugschriften*. The visual impact of this great heap of Reformation writings, piled up seemingly at random, was very strong, and set me musing on the contemporary impact of such literature: the extraordinarily innovative manner in which the Reformation made its appeal for public support, and the manner, perhaps very different, in which this appeal was received. I have been ruminating on these questions ever since, even as other writing projects have directed my immediate attention to more specific tasks. This book is an attempt to give these thoughts some sort of systematic expression. With the passage of years since 1991 I have obviously read and learned a very great deal, working primarily on the experience of Reformation in four main areas: Germany, the Netherlands, France and the two kingdoms of Britain, England and Scotland. Much of this has been learned through the guidance of friends and professional colleagues, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge here the help and inspiration of scholars on both sides of the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean. Many people have guided my exploration of the various literary disciplines and media explored in this volume. Specific debts are acknowledged at appropriate places in the text, but I should also express my gratitude to the three anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press, who gave the first proposal for this project a rigorous workout. A more general debt is owed to the many students and scholars whose work I have heard at conferences, particularly the Reformation Colloquium, the European Reformation Research Group and the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference. Reformation scholars are especially well served by our conference culture, but this would not be so without the heroic efforts of those who devote so much time to organizing these meetings. Two friends, Alastair Duke and Peter Marshall, were kind enough to read the whole text of this book in draft,

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and their observations helped me greatly as I prepared the final text for publication. I also owe a special debt to my wife Jane, whose expertise in the fields of music and early modern drama have immeasurably increased my knowledge in preparing the chapters devoted to these topics here. My two daughters Megan and Sophie also helped me understand the process of learning, not least the enduring power of rote learning, the importance of melody, and the fantastic power of the human memory. Over the years my graduate students have taught me an enormous amount about diverse topics, and all of them will see a little bit of themselves reflected here. In recent years I have also benefited greatly from the opportunity of sustained field-work with members of the St Andrews French Book Project team, especially my two principal colleagues in that enterprise, Alexander Wilkinson and Malcolm Walsby. A first draft of this text was test-driven by my third-year Reformation Honours course at St Andrews, and I am grateful to them for their perceptive comments. Finally, one cannot be for twenty years, as I have been, a friend, and latterly colleague, of Bruce Gordon without learning an enormous amount of Reformation history. The impact of his conversation, his versatile mind and deep learning, have over the years been more profound than I can easily acknowledge. For this reason I dedicate this book to Bruce, and to his family, Rona and Charlotte.